



## Conference Report

### UAS4EUROPE Networking Conference 2021

#### *From breakthrough ideas to breakthrough innovation*

UAS4EUROPE hosted its third Networking Conference on 11 May 2021. Due to sanitary constraints, this was the network's first virtual event. The aim was to discuss the role of universities of applied sciences (UAS) in transforming breakthrough ideas into breakthrough innovation in a post-Covid recovery phase marked by the twin transitions (green & digital).

With 400 participants from 25 European countries, it was the most successful conference organised by UAS4EUROPE to date. The event was organized in two parts: political discussions in the morning and networking opportunities in the afternoon. Furthermore, a virtual exhibition enabled our member UAS to present themselves and selected projects.

This report summarizes the discussed content during the keynote speeches, the panel discussion and the thematic workshops.

#### Welcome Address by Christiane Fritze, Chairwoman of UAS4EUROPE

In her opening remarks, Prof. Christiane Fritze, Rector of [Coburg UAS](#) in Bavaria and Chairwoman of UAS4EUROPE at the time of the Networking Conference, emphasised that UAS forge close partnerships with regional industries, authorities and citizens and are thus **key players in mastering the green and digital transitions**. However, in order to exploit their maximum potential, **UAS must be more strongly recognised** as drivers of regional development on the EU and international stage.

#### Opening Speech by Bernd Sibler, Bavarian State Minister of Science and the Arts

As patron and host of the Networking Conference, Minister Bernd Sibler underlined that the different types of universities must be seen as the main actors in the fields of research, education and innovation, as they not only generate new knowledge, but are the **cornerstone of knowledge and technology transfer**. UAS in particular bridge the gap between the development of new ideas and their actual implementation through their close ties within regional innovation ecosystems. Furthermore, **regions must have a say in the development of the renewed [European Research Area](#)** as they are important policymakers, drivers of R&D funding and indispensable partners in tackling the challenges of today.

#### Keynote Speech by Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, Youth and Sport

In her keynote speech, Commissioner Gabriel outlined the need to maintain Europe's excellent science, but also to transform it into **innovation leadership**. UAS in particular are called upon to contribute to the success of Horizon Europe. As key regional players and drivers of applied sciences with immediate impact, UAS could be particularly successful in the **Missions** and the new **European Innovation Council (EIC)**. The Commissioner also



encourages UAS to become more involved in the **European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)** to foster the creation and connection of innovation ecosystems.

With a strong focus on the innovation aspect, Commissioner Gabriel also referred to the planned [Innovation Area](#) as an enabler for a new transformative innovation policy.

## Keynote speech by Angelika Niebler, MEP, Member of the ITRE Committee

Dr. Niebler notes that UAS, through their place-based contribution to regional development processes and their practical approach to training the future workforce, play the **most important role in developing the innovations needed for societal change**. In order to further promote the comparative advantages of practice-oriented research, UAS must be more widely established in Europe and **more closely integrated into R&I policymaking**.

## Panel Discussion: Universities of Applied Sciences - Key players in using regional power for a green and innovative Europe

The objective of this panel discussion was to discuss the comparative advantages of UAS as well as their role in European innovation ecosystems, the skills agenda, global challenges and Horizon Europe with the following speakers:

- Signe Ratso, Deputy Director-General, DG RTD, European Commission
- Claudia Gamon, MEP, Member of the ITRE Committee
- Marjolijn Brussaard, UAS4EUROPE Vice Chair & Board Member of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
- Krista Taipale, Director for International Affairs, Regional Council of Häme, Finland
- Pascal Brunner, CEO & Co-founder, Vatorex AG

### UAS in tertiary education systems

Germany, Switzerland and Austria have had great success with the integration of UAS into their tertiary education systems. The same applies to Finland, where UAS have three functions as per national law: education, RTD, and fostering regional development. However, the speakers note that the **lack of sustainable and strategic funding** from national and supranational authorities is the biggest obstacle to realising their full potential.

### UAS as collaboration partners

The panel concurs that UAS are **important cooperation partners for regional authorities**, which is becoming increasingly relevant as innovation ecosystems are becoming more and more important in Europe. In addition, UAS are **key partners for regional start-ups and SMEs** to access knowledge and innovation faster (i.e. innovation centres) and to help young entrepreneurs to network and secure funding.

### European Innovation Ecosystems

Europe is facing fierce competition in the field of innovation. To play their part, UAS need the **security of sustainable funding, academic freedom and the opportunity to build an effective technology transfer infrastructure** within their own institutions. To close the innovation gap, Europe also needs to attract more venture capital.



In addition, the European Commission has launched the **ERA hubs initiative**, which aims to stimulate place-based innovation by promoting intra- and interregional connectivity of innovation ecosystems. In this context, Signe Ratso invites UAS to contribute to the consultation process.

### Skills agenda

Claudia Gamon outlines that politics should refrain from defining which jobs and skills will be needed in the future. Rather, this develops in a bottom-up approach, to which UAS contribute significantly through their **collaboration with industry and high degree of responsiveness to real-time labour market needs** in providing the skilled workforce for innovative companies. Marjolijn Brussaard adds that UAS must be given the opportunity to create flexible places for students & researchers to define what is needed now. Above all, the key to proactively identifying future needs is to **work closely with companies**.

### UAS in Horizon Europe

The European Commission defines Horizon Europe as driven by simplification and synergies. **Simplification** levels the playing field and eases participation, and operational **synergies** between Horizon Europe, cohesion policy and regional development funds can boost regional RTD actors like UAS. Although Horizon Europe offers many entry points for applied research and innovation through pillars 2 and 3, Marjolijn Brussaard calls for **UAS researchers to be better integrated into panels, expert groups and evaluation bodies of funding agencies** and proposes a **fixed quota of research funding for UAS/practice-based research** for this purpose.

### Key takeaways from the workshop sessions

- UAS are often inexperienced with Horizon programmes
- Applying for Horizon is recommended but requires good preparation and a (international) network, also making use of national contact points and other advisory services
- Horizon Europe earmarks 50% of its budget to collaborative research through the Clusters in pillar 2 but sustainable funding for UAS-research is lacking in European countries
- UAS need to earn trust in European projects
- When applying for European grants, balance and diversity in teams is important
- Biggest challenge in Horizon projects related to ethics and accounting
- Networking and attending thematic events in the respective fields is the easiest way to find project partners
- Low acceptance rate of UAS in Horizon programmes due to traditional indicators that do not always fit the research profile of UAS. Rather, economic and sociological impact should be measured and considered as evaluation criteria.
- UAS change and adapt their curricula quickly compared to traditional universities, also due to the intrinsic motivation and practice-based education of the students.



Re-watch the UAS4EUROPE Networking Conference 2021 [here](#).

More about UAS4EUROPE: [www.uas4europe.eu](http://www.uas4europe.eu)

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